THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH):

(a) and (b) Government is aware of reports attributing these remarks to the former U.S. President regarding the meeting that took place between him and the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Nawaz Sharif on 4 July 1999 in Washington D.C.

Pakistan's armed intrusion in Kargil was defeated through the skills, professionalism, courage and valour of the Indian Armed Forces. The international community, including the United States, had criticised Pakistan for its action in Kargil and had advised the Government of Pakistan to reverse its intrusion.

Passport offices

2636. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

(a) the number of passport offices in Rajasthan, Delhi and Orissa (State-wise) and (city-wise);

(b) whether Government have any proposal to relax the procedure with a view to expedite the issue of passport and to reduce the time taken in the process by opening more such offices in the above States; and

(c) if so, the details of the guidelines issued to the passport of each State in the above matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) One passport office each is located in Rajasthan (Jaipur), Delhi (Delhi) and Orissa (Bhubaneshwar).

(b) and (c) There is no proposal to open more passport offices in the above mentioned States. However, several measures have been taken to simplify and expedite processing of passport applications in various passport offices including the Passport Offices in Rajasthan, Delhi, and Orissa. These measures are : (a) computerisation of processing procedures, (b) simplification of passport application form, (c) introduction of Tatkal Scheme for issue of out of turn passport, (d) decentralisation of passport services to enbale submission of completed application form at designated speed post centres at district level, (e) provision of dispatch of passports by speed post, (f) introduction of machine writing of passports and (g) expediting police verification report with the Passport Officers holding regular consultation with the police authorities in their respective areas etc. Besides, the Govt. has recently constituted a Committee to review the passport issue system aimed at simplifying the process of issue of passports.

Chinese support of Pakistan on Kashmir

2637. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news- item under the heading "China backs Pak, position on Kashmir" which appeared in the 'Hindu' dated 12th May, 2001;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) whether the matter has been/or is proposed to be taken up with the Chinese Government as a part of India's normalisation of relations with that country and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The State of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral, part of the Indian Union.

Non-essential travel to Sri Lanka

2638. SHRI KA. RA. SUBBIAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that on the lines of US, Britain, whether Government too have issued instructions urging Indian citizens to delay non-essential travel to Sri Lankan Island keeping in view the recent attack by L.TTE on the country's only International airport; and

(b) whether Government have taken up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government about the security aspect of the Indian citizens living there.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) No, Sir.

(b) The High Commission of India in Colombo maintains regular contact with local authorities and Indian nationals and takes all possible steps to ensure the safety and welfare of Indian nationals.

Attack on Indians in Kuala Lampur

2639. SHRI RAM MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of ethnic Indians died in the recent attack by Malayas in Kuala Lampur, etc.,

(b) whether his Ministry had done or proposed to do. through dioplimatic channels, to protect the Indian community in Malaysia;